

The Filling of the Spirit

by G. Campbell Morgan

The filling of the Spirit is the normal condition of the believer, where they are filled with the Holy Spirit and live a Spirit-filled life, and it can be lost and restored through obedience to God's commands.

Topics: "Spiritual Empowerment", "Holy Spirit"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of the filling of the Holy Spirit as a normal condition for every believer, asserting that it should occur at the moment of conversion rather than as a delayed experience. He illustrates this through various biblical examples, including John the Baptist, Elisabeth, Zacharias, and the apostles, highlighting that the filling of the Spirit equips individuals for specific tasks and empowers them for service. Morgan clarifies that while the Spirit is present in every believer, disobedience can obstruct the fullness of the Spirit, which can be restored through repentance and obedience. He concludes that the divine intention is for all Christians to live a Spirit-filled life continuously, not just at certain moments. The sermon calls for believers to recognize their responsibility in maintaining this filling through faithfulness to God.

Transcript

IN discussing this subject, the one matter of importance is the discovery of the sense in which the term the filling of the Spirit is used in the New Testament.

In one form or another it occurs four times prior to the Pentecostal effusion:--

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mothers womb.

And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; and she lifted up her voice with a loud cry.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days. John, the forerunner of the Christ, was filled with the Spirit from his birth. Elisabeth was filled with the Spirit for the singing of a sacred song. Zacharias was filled with the Spirit for the uttering of prophecy. The Lord was filled with the Spirit for the exercise of His Messianic ministry.

This filling of certain persons, prior to the Pentecostal effusion, was a continuation of the Spirit's work, in keeping with the methods which had characterized the whole of the dispensation then drawing to a close. Just as in the past the Spirit had filled men for the accomplishment of special work for God; so, as the dispensation drew to a close, and Messiah approached, He again equipped those who were to do the special work the occasion demanded.

A clear line is drawn between the old and the new dispensations; and the teaching of the New Testament concerning the filling of the Spirit in the dispensation which had its birth at Pentecost is very distinct.

The expression occurs in the Acts of the Apostles eight times, and once in the Letter to the Ephesians. These passages practically contain the whole system.

The sum of that teaching is that the Spirit-filled life is the normal condition of the believer. There are those who believe that the filling of the Spirit is something which is not merely a second blessing in the experience of the majority of Christians, but in the purpose of God. But just as the baptism of the Spirit is never spoken of as a second blessing, but always as the initial blessing of regeneration; so in the economy of God the filling of the Spirit is coincident with conversion. When a man is baptized with the Spirit, he is born of the Spirit, and is filled with the Spirit. There are many who do not enter into the realization of that blessedness at conversion. In the purpose of God, however, the normal condition of Christian life is that of being baptized by the Spirit into life, and filled with the Spirit for life.

Nothing can be clearer than the statement of what happened on the Day of Pentecost: And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. In the moment when the group of Jewish disciples was transformed into the Church, the Spirit was not only given to them, He filled them. It is evident, therefore, from the account of the opening of the dispensation, that in the purpose of God those who passed into its new life, new glory, new breadth, and new beauty were baptized and filled with the Spirit.

An illustration of this occurs in the history of the early days. Saul of Tarsus, breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, was on his way to Damascus, when he was suddenly arrested by the shining of a light from heaven; he heard the voice of Jesus, and yielded to the claim of the Master, saying: What shall I do, Lord? He remained blind; and having been led to Damascus, the Master sent Ananias to him: And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. It may be a matter of opinion as to whether that was the moment of his conversion or not.' Even if he were born of the Spirit on the way to Damascus, the filling of the Spirit, according to this teaching, came immediately, and was part of the very earliest experience of his Christian life.

It follows, therefore, that the will of God for His people is that they should be filled at once; that God does not give a man the Spirit to-day, and then make him, as a necessity, wait for perhaps a number of years before he is filled with the Spirit; but that the supreme miracle by which a man is born of the Spirit, and so baptized of the Spirit into new relationship with Christ, is also the miracle by which he becomes filled with the Spirit of God.

There is another use made of this same phrase in the Acts of the Apostles: And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, By what power, or in what name, have ye done this! Then Peter, filled with the

Holy Spirit, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders, if we this day are examined. . . . The sense of the word filled in this case is that of being specially filled for special work. It does not describe a normal condition of life, but a specific filling, in order that he might be specially prepared for work that awaited him at that moment. Filled with the Spirit, he spake the words.

Another instance of the same kind is chronicled in the words: But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him [that is, on Elymas the sorcerer], and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? A special work of discipline had to be performed: a man who had wronged the truth and the faith had to be rebuked, and Paul was suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit for the doing of that particular work.

Again the term is used in a way that includes the filling for life and service, the former being viewed as the condition for the latter: Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. . . . And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip. . . . These men were chosen for work in the Church because they were full of the Spirit.

It is written of Barnabas that he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

These are the occasions where the term is used in the Acts of the Apostles with reference to service. Twice in the case of the deacons, and also in the case of Barnabas, it is evident that the condition for service is that men should be full of the Spirit--not that there should be a special gift, but that they should be living the life that is Spirit-filled. Where that is so, they are fit for the office of deacon; where that is so, they are fit, as was Barnabas, for visiting the churches and for administering spiritual comfort. But from the other instances of Peter and Paul, it is equally clear that the term is used with reference to a special filling for a special work.

The phrase is also used in a sense proving that though the filling of the Spirit is the normal condition of the believer's life, yet it may be lost and restored: And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the 'Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness. This has been erroneously spoken of as the second Pentecost. There can be no second Pentecost. Pentecost came once and for ever. Undoubtedly a second manifestation of the Spirit is here referred to; but it was rendered necessary because these men had passed into a realm of fear and of trembling. Peter and John were imprisoned, and the disciples were gathered in fear and trembling, hardly daring to open the doors or show themselves. When Peter and John were miraculously restored and came into their midst, they gave themselves to prayer, asking that they might have boldness. The answer to their prayer was the shaking of the house in which they were assembled, and their refilling with the Spirit. These men had not lost the Spirit. They had been sealed unto the day of redemption. Born of the Spirit, the Spirit remained in them; but through their own fear, unbelief, and lack of loyalty to Jesus Christ, the blessing of the Spirit's fulness had been lost. When they returned to the Lord, the filling was granted to them anew.

Another instance is recorded which gives yet another light on the subject. Of Stephen it is said: But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Passing through martyrdom, Stephen was strengthened in his suffering

by a vision of his Master in the glory. The condition for seeing the vision was the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

These are the only instances in the Acts of the Apostles where the term filling of the Spirit is used. The sum of their teaching may thus be stated. The Spirit-filled life is the normal condition of the believer; it may be lost; it can be restored. New-born souls, baptized by the Spirit into union with Christ, are filled; but very often, for lack of clear teaching and full understanding of the law of the Spirit, the fulness of the blessing is lost.

There are thousands whose memories go back to some convention, to some service, to some hour of loneliness with God, when they became Spirit-filled in a sense which they had never experienced before. The explanation of this fact is, that at some point in their Christian life, preceding the experience of which they speak as a second blessing, they had been disobedient to the Divine purpose; and therefore the blame of the low level life preceding that blessing is to be laid, not upon the economy of God, but upon the disloyalty of the believer. There is no reason why a man should not immediately from the moment of regeneration enter into all the blessedness of the Spirit-filled life: that is the Divine intention, and that is the Divine purpose. This is a question of condition and not of finality. The law of growth is that the believer should be Spirit-filled.

For special service there is, however, a special filling of the Holy Spirit, and whether it be Peter or Paul or any other servant of Christ having a special work to do for Him, that servant may be especially filled with the Spirit for the accomplishment of that special work.

There is one other passage demanding attention: And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit. The injunction be filled with the Spirit is in the imperative. It is a command; and the fact that it is a command lays responsibility, not upon God, but upon the believer. In the commencement of the Epistle the whole scheme of thought which was here in the mind of the apostle is stated: In Whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,--in Whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance. The sealing of the Spirit is identical with the baptism of the Spirit. The apostle is writing to people who are sealed with the Spirit, and he charges them to be filled with the Spirit. Here are two distinct things--the sealing of the Spirit, and the filling of the Spirit. Though the filling be coincident with the sealing, it is necessary to enjoin these people to be filled, because that is the point of their responsibility. That responsibility is revealed in the words: Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in Whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption.' Here is a solution of the mystery that gathers around the experience of thousands of Christians. They are born of the Spirit, and none will deny that they are Christians. They are not, however, filled with the Spirit, for the fruit of the Spirit is not manifest in their lives. The reason for this is that they have grieved the Holy Spirit of God somewhere in the past. The path of obedience has been clearly marked, and they have disobeyed. Christian people who are baptized by the Spirit into new relationship with Christ have grieved the Spirit by disobedience, lukewarmness, indifference to the claims of Christ, worldliness, or frivolity, and they are therefore not filled with the Spirit. The subject of responsibility, showing what are the conditions of the filling and what is the result of the filling, will form the subject of a subsequent chapter.

Dr. Erdmann, of Philadelphia, has given a formula of the law of the Spirit in these words--One baptism, many fillings; and perhaps no statement of the case could be more helpful. It is borne out by New Testament teaching and history. One baptism--the moment of the new birth, when the Spirit comes upon the repenting and believing soul and unites that soul to Christ. Christians may be disobedient and lose the filling of the Spirit, and by repentance and obedience it may be restored; and in the experience of

multitudes of believers this formula is proved to be correct--One baptism, but many fillings.

This is also illustrated, as has been already shown, by the filling of the apostles at the baptism of Pentecost, and by their refilling subsequently, which was by no means a second baptism. The specific fillings for service are the fillings to overflowing, of which the Lord Himself declared: He that believeth on Me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This third phase of blessing, the specific work of the Spirit for service, has sometimes been spoken of as an anointing of the Spirit, but without Scripture warrant. The term anointing of the Spirit is used only twice with regard to Christians. In both places the reference is to regeneration. There are those who are perpetually declaring that Christians must follow in the steps of Christ, and that, as He was anointed for His work, so must they be for theirs; but there is no perfect analogy between the dealings of God with Christ, and His dealings with believers, because Christ was sinless and spotless, while they have always to be dealt with as those who have failed, and must be restored to the divine pattern. It would be just as incorrect to speak of a second anointing as of a second Pentecost, or of a second Pentecost as of a second anointing. The anointing which is on the child of God is that which was received at regeneration. What is needed for life is the perpetual filling of the Spirit which is the normal condition of those who are living in the way of God, and the specific fillings to overflowing which may always be counted on when special service demands.

Every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ having vital relationship with Him, became a Christian when baptized with the Holy Spirit, and at the moment of baptism was filled with the Spirit. If not filled with the Spirit now, the blame is to be laid, not upon the Master, but upon personal disobedience. Somewhere in the life of relationship to Christ there was a moment of disobedience, a moment of disloyalty, a moment of rebellion against government; and by that rebellion the filling of the Spirit was lost. It may be restored by restoration to obedience, the new yielding of the life to the Spirit. He will enter and will take possession of the territory from which by disobedience He has been excluded. Dr. Handley Moule, who is perhaps one of the most lucid exponents of the Scriptures upon this subject, says that the difference between a soul that is filled with the Spirit and one that is unfilled, is the difference between a well in which there is a spring of water choked, and a well from which the obstruction has been removed, so that the water springs up and fills the well. In every child of God the Spirit is present, waiting to fill; and if He does not fill the whole life to its utmost bound with His own energy, light, and power, it is because there is something which prevents Him, and which must be removed before He can do His blessed work.

The filling of the Spirit is indeed an experience far beyond that of which the majority of Christians know anything; but it is the purpose of God that every child of His should be filled, not a year, nor two years, nor ten years after conversion, but at the moment of conversion, and perpetually until the consummation of his sojourn upon the earth.

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